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SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETING WITH BOLIVIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: A/DCM Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Charge met with Bolivian FM David Choquehuanca the night of September 14 to raise concerns about possible protests at the Embassy and in the Zona Sur residential neighborhood planned for September 15 and 16. The Charge asked the Foreign Minister for security guarantees and for the Bolivian government to live up to its Vienna Convention obligations. FM Choquehuanca downplayed the prospects for protests and said that he was not aware of any planned demonstrations. He acknowledged that the government of Bolivia has an obligation to protect diplomatic missions. At the Charge's request, Choquehuanca promised that he would discuss the matter with Minister of Government Alfredo Rada and through his Ministry with the social movements (noting that he has someone within the MFA that is a contact with the social groups. This is the first time the government has confirmed to us that it has contacts with social groups regarding potential demonstrations.) The Charge pointed out that there would be further consequences to the bilateral relationship if the Mission and its personnel were not provided appropriate protection by the government. FM Choquehuanca told the Charge that his government does not want a worsening of the bilateral relationship. The morning of September 15, Government Minister Rada publicly announced on television that the protesters should not march on the Embassy because "the Ambassador has left the country." While we welcome this unprecedented announcement by Rada, we do not know if this will in fact defuse the potential for a violent demonstration or if it was done so that the government can say it tried but later assert that it is not responsible as it does not control the social movements.

¶2. (C) The Charge further emphasized that demonizing the Embassy and the opposition does not contribute to an environment of dialogue. FM Choquehuanca questioned Ambassador Goldberg's recent meeting with opposition prefect (governor) Sabina Cuellar and the content of said meeting. The Charge explained it was routine for us to have contact with democratically-elected officials. The Foreign Minister mentioned that the day after the meeting Prefect Cuellar called for President Evo Morales to resign; Choquehuanca implied that the Ambassador had something to do with her actions. Charge pushed back and asked why the Bolivian

government does not question other Embassies when their diplomats meet with opposition figures. Charge mentioned that the current conditions are not right for a bilateral dialogue but that A/S Shannon would consider a meeting on the margins of United Nations General Assembly to discuss the situation in Bolivia. FM Choquehuanca seemed receptive to such a meeting.

13. (C) FM Choquehuanca said that his "government does not endorse nor want violence." He complained that the opposition takeovers of national offices were acts of vandalism and that the "over thirty deaths" in Pando were by hired killers. The Foreign Minister mentioned that a statement from the USG against the opposition's violence and calling for them to restore calm would help the situation. The Charge pointed out that no statement from any country or international organization classifies the opposition's actions as vandalism and that two sides are involved. The Charge also reiterated the U.S. position, stated publicly on multiple occasions, that we support Bolivia's territorial integrity and unity and want to see the country's problems resolved peacefully through dialogue. FM Choquehuanca replied that "it is possible our government has made some errors." He added that the president has said he is willing to discuss all the issues in contention, including tax revenue distribution (IDH), with the opposition. FM Choquehuanca said the issue of re-election in the new constitution was not a big deal because "Evo has said he only wants to be re-elected just one more time." The Foreign Minister confirmed that President Evo Morales would travel to Santiago, Chile on September 15 for an emergency meeting of South American Presidents (UNASUR) called by Chilean President Bachelet to deal with the Bolivian crisis. FM Choquehuanca said that the opposition prefects (governors) should not be allowed to participate as this is a meeting for presidents only. We have heard from other sources that opposition Senate President Oscar Ortiz is planning to travel to Santiago.

14. (C) Note: Although the Charge mentioned that the bilateral relationship is now downgraded and that there would not be a new ambassador anytime soon, the Foreign Minister did not seem to grasp the concept and insisted on calling the Charge 'ambassador'. End note.

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